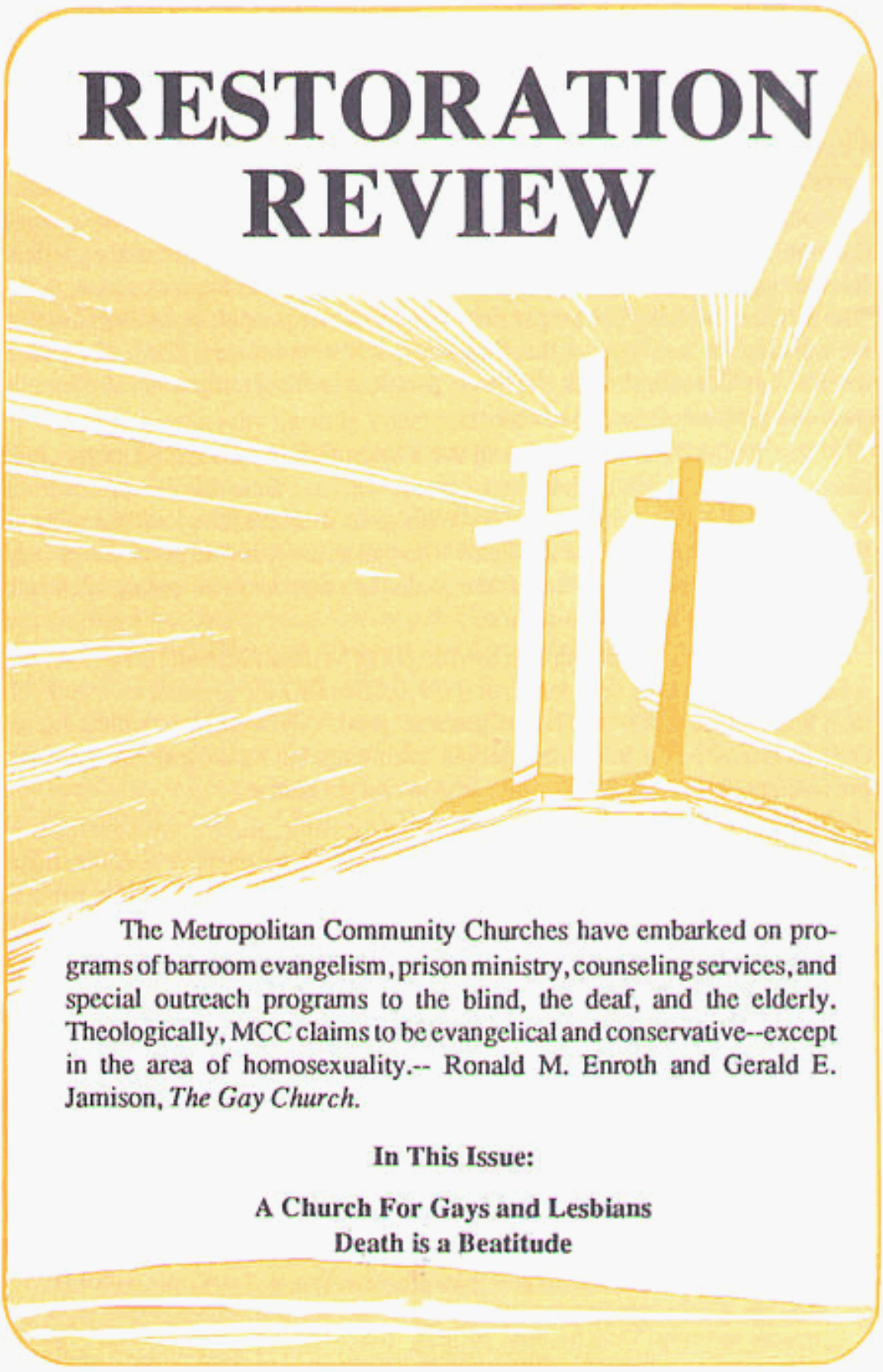
RESTORATION REVIEW



The Metropolitan Community Churches have embarked on programs of barroom evangelism, prison ministry, counseling services, and special outreach programs to the blind, the deaf, and the elderly. Theologically, MCC claims to be evangelical and conservative--except in the area of homosexuality.-- Ronald M. Enroth and Gerald E. Jamison, *The Gay Church.*

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Restoration Review, Vol. 31, No. 7, September 1989

The Hope of the Believer...No. 7

DEATH IS A BEATITUDE

Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.

— Rev. 14:13

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.

— Ps. 116:15

Death is a beatitude! It is a liberating concept. if people would view death in this light, it would go far in relieving them of mankind's most dreaded experience. Even though we are all aware that death is inevitable, it is the rare person that has "the problem of dying" in proper perspective. Many people, including Christians, are reluctant to face the fact that they really will one day die. They don't want to think about it or talk about ii To some people it is sheer terror to think about their own death with any degree of reality.

Theologian Paul Tillich viewed the whole of human history in terms of three basic fears: guilt, death, meaninglessness. Re *saw* these fears expressed in the literature produced through the ages. What great thinkers have said in coping with the fear of death is as diverse as "There's no bad mother, and no good death," which is a Yiddish proverb, and "Death is the golden key that opens the palace

of eternity," expressed by the blind John Milton.

In this piece I am saying that the insight of William Mitford is right on target when he writes, "Men fear death, as if unquestionably the greatest evil, and yet no man knows that it may not be the *greatest good."* That death is a blessing to be cherished may be far from most people's thinking, but I am confident that we can prove that to be the case both

from reason and revelation.

We are all impressed by the beatitudes of the Bible, and we are acquainted with most of them: *Blessed are the poor in spirit; Blessed are the pure in heart; Blessed are the peace-makers.* On and on it goes. It hardly occurs to us that the Bible also names death as a beatitude. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord" (Rev. 14:13)

is a neglected beatitude. It is a blessing we need to believe and receive, for it is saying that when a believer dies he is fortunate. He is better off than if he were still living in this world. Our drive for self-preservation makes it difficult for us to accept this truth.

That beatitude was pronounced from heaven itself by an anonymous voice. The voice told John, isolated as he was on the island of Patmos, to write down the beatitude. To be told to write down something, which occurs now and again in Revelation, was both for preservation and for emphasis. We don't know who spoke the beatitude from heaven, but it is exciting to see that the Holy Spirit made a response to it, as if to underscore its truth: "Yes, that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them."

How this should buoy up the hope of the believer! He has the assurance of heaven itself, underscored by the Holy Spirit, that death is a beatitude. Two reasons are given as to

why death is a blessing. The dead rest from their earthly labors, which probably refers to being free of oppression and persecution. There is no more pain and no more sorrow. God wipes away all tears from their eyes. They are at rest. This can't mean that they rest in the sense of no longer having anything to do, for we know that the blessed dead (who are not really dead but alive) are busy serving God and facing new challenges. But the sorrows and sufferings of this world are done with.

Another reason why death is a beatitude, according to the Holy Spirit, is that "their works follow them." This is our assurance that the believer never lives in this world in vain. He leaves his good works behind and they will bear their fruit, even when it may not be apparent. Our kindly deeds, our words of encouragement, our ongoing efforts in behalf of our family, church, and world will eventually bear fruit. That the Holy Spirit would say this of the

triumphant believers then in heaven would suggest that it was then evident that their efforts were indeed bearing fruit. In heaven they could see that they had not lived and died (perhaps by martyrdom) in vain. Their works follow them, even into heaven itself.

The Bible names another reason why death is a beatitude: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints"

(Ps. 116:15). If I have counted right, there are only two things in Scripture that are described as precious to God. One is that "living stone" which is Christ in 1 Pet. 2:4. The other is the death of his saints. There are many things, of course, that are precious to God, but it is interesting that these are the two things specifically mentioned. If our death is precious to God, we should have no fear of it nor any dread of it.

Some believers point out that it is not death that they dread but the act of dying itself. That

is an understandable concern, but we have good reason for believing that dying is no ordeal. Illness that leads to death might be painful, but illness is always more or less painful. By God's grace we bear the pain and it soon passes. But dying itself is no more than walking from one room into the next. We can count on it being simple and beautiful. Paul spoke of his death as "my departure" (2 Tim. 4:6), which is a mariner's term, referring to the loosening of the ropes that frees the boat to ease out to sea. He sees dying as being with Christ and "very far better" (Philip. 1:23), and he likens it unto being "at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8) and "falling asleep in Jesus" (1 Thess. 4:14).

The imagery of being at home with the Lord is beautiful. It assures us that in death we are not leaving home but going home. And dying itself is no more than loosening the ropes that hold the boat and allowing it

to ease out into the deep, which takes us home. Dying? There is nothing to it. You can take it from Paul that it is no more than falling off to sleep-"asleep in Jesus," except that we are never really asleep in death but always conscious.

Death is a beatitude also because it is a necessary part of God's plan for us. It would be tragic if we were destined to live forever in this world. We would soon be longing for death so that we could move on to the next world. John Bunyan was right when he saw death as "a passage out of prison into a palace; out of a sea of troubles into a haven of rest." This makes death the entree of all that awaits us in glory. The call

of death is thus the call to come up higher. It is the call to come home.

Jesus thus spoke of the necessity of his own death, but what he said applies to us all: "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain" (Jn. 12:12).

We know that the wheat seed must die if it is to live again in multiplied

abundance';. Jesus bore much fruit by dying, for countless millions have been blessed through his death. It is true of all believers, for we cannot bear fruit in heaven and we cannot make any sense of our earthly sojourn except by dying.

This makes death the most natural and reasonable thing in the world. Death makes life rational. Can you imagine a king building a palace without a door? Or a student entering a school from which he never graduates? By the very nature of life we see that it has its exit into something beyond. If life in this world is all there is, then it is all irrational, sheer absurdity. That the most rational of people all through the ages have longed

for a life beyond, anticipating it in religion, poetry, and song, strongly implies it will be realized.

It is like an egg in a bird's nest that pulsates with life and potential. The little hatchling struggles to be free of its shell. It gradually pecks its way to freedom. While confined in its shell it has wings for flight and a throat for song, but if it remains in its shell it will never fly and never sing. If it ends there it is all nonsense. But if ours is a world where the hatchling breaks free from its shell and eventually flies and sings, then it is a world that makes sense.

So it is with every living soul. If all our hopes and longings end in death then life makes no sense. But if this world is "a vale of soul-making," as one poet puts it' and we are being prepared for something higher, then life here makes sense. When creatures destined to fly and sing do indeed fly and sing, we can have hope that our destiny will also be realized.

It is reassuring that the one who kne

w the most about life and death spoke of a future life with absolute certainty. To the thief that died alongside him Jesus said, "Today you will be with me in paradise." He did not simply express hope that there might be something more for them. He had complete assurance that in a matter of hours he would be in heaven and the thief would be with him.

Only death stood between Jesus and paradise. It was a door he entered with joy. When we follow him it will be no different for us. We too can be absolutely certain.

— the Editor

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The Hope of the Believer . . .

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WHAT DIFFERENCE DO DIFFERENCES MAKE?

An article in *Guardian of Truth* ,a Church of Christ paper, authored by Steve Wolfgang, on the history of the institutional controversy caught my eye, mainly because it raised the question as to whether the 25-year old controversy could have been avoided. The "institutional controversy" concerns such matters as the support of the Herald of Truth TV-Radio program, colleges, and orphan homes. Journals, colleges, churches, preachers have taken different sides. Numerous debates have been held through the years. Some of those involved in the dispute contend that another division has already taken place, adding still another kind of Church of Christ to a list that is already far too long. That is the case in my own hometown where we have what one side calls an "anti" Church of Christ and the other side calls the "institutional" Churches of Christ. There is no fellowship between them.

I do not recognize such drawing of lines against sisters and brothers in Christ, and I do not believe in such sectarianism. I have no "anti" brethren or "institutional" brethren. They are all my brethren in Christ equally, and I love and accept them all. I may not agree with either side, but that has nothing to do with the fact that we have all been baptized into Christ and are part of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. We are in fellowship with each other whether we like it or not, and we should like it since it was God who called us into the fellowship, not some party. We will have to give an account to him as to the way we treat our brothers and sisters in Christ.

But I was interested in what the writer would say about whether the fratricidal altercation could have been avoided. His answer was that it could not. Was the division preventable? No, he says. Was it inevitable? Yes. Is there any possibility of the restoral of fellowship? He says no, though he wishes it were otherwise.

What impresses me about the article is the underlying assumption that the differences have to be resolved before there can be fellowship. The writer says, for example, that the division could not be avoided because the differences could not be resolved. He quotes historian David Harrell, who is on his side of the controversy, as saying: "Does anyone seriously believe that the thousands of unscriptural promotions dreamed up will suddenly, or slowly, begin to disappear? Of course not. No man could bring it off; not 20 or 50 or 200 men could bring it off. And not only *could* they not, they *will* not bring it about."

It is clear that these brethren believe that fellowship is contingent on seeing eye to-eye on "the issues." Each of our sects has its own set of "issues" that it makes tests of fellowship. Harrell is saying that the institutional brethren are not going to give up their institutions, so there can be no fellowship with them. Others in the Church of Christ would say the same thing about Harrell: They refuse to have fellowship with him because he won't give up his "unscriptural promotions," such as multiple cups for Communion and the Sunday School.

This mentality that we must agree on all these things before we can be in fellowship is a fallacy that has been our undoing. It is the reason why our people, who began as a movement to unite the Christians in all the sects, have divided and subdivided into twenty-odd fragments in this century alone. It is contrary to the genius of our Movement, which was based upon the premise of "In essentials, unity; in opinions (and methods), liberty; in all things, love," and had as one of its epigrams "We are free to differ, but not to divide."

Those of a different spirit insist on the converse of that: We are not free to differ, but we are free to divide.

Their position is also at odds with the very Book they look to as authoritative.

As far back as Abraham there was the principle that men can see things differently and still accept each other as brothers. Abraham and Lot had a dispute. The patriarch pled with his nephew on the grounds that "We are kinsmen" or "We are brethren," and so "Let there be no dispute between you and me" (Gen. 13:8). Abraham's conciliatory spirit was based upon what has always been considered common sense neighborliness: People can disagree without falling out.

That spirit has had difficulty surviving among God's people. Even the apostle John was afflicted with narrow exclusivism, according to Mk. 9:38. He found one casting out demons in the name of Christ and forbade him, for "he was not following us." He reported this to Jesus,

as a good party man would, expecting the Lord to support him. The Lord did not go along, which must have surprised John as much as it does many sectarians today, who have a way of ignoring this passage. Jesus told John not to forbid him, for if one is not against him he is for him. Here Jesus makes it clear that his followers can have differences and still accept each other. And the differences can be substantial enough that they do not follow each other-"He follows not us," John complained.

This principle became an apostolic mandate as a means of preserving unity amidst diversity: "As for the man who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not for disputes over opinions" (Rom. 14:1). This tells us plainly that we are to receive each other despite differences. This was generally the practice of the early Christians. The congregations were not carbon copies of each other. Even Paul and Peter had their differences *within* the fellowship.

So, the answer to our question as to what difference differences make we have to conclude that they do not have to disrupt fellowship *so long as they are matters of opinion, methods, and personal or congregational preference.* There were some problems in the early church that were far more serious and they threatened the survival of the church itself. Tradition has it that the apostle John fled the bathhouse when the heretic Cerenthus entered. This was a far different case than the one of the man who was serving Christ but not following with John, for Cerenthus was a Gnostic who preached a different gospel.

This is to say that there are differences that matter enough that they render fellowship impossible. If they deny or compromise the essentials of the faith, they cannot be tolerated. This is why in Scripture a heretic is to be rejected (Tit. 3:10), false teachers are identified (2 Pet. 2:1-3), deceivers of the simple are marked (Ro. 16:17-18), and the antichrists are not to be received (2 Jn. 7-10).

But these are not the kinds of differences that Wolfgang and Harrell are talking about. A brother who believes he may support gospel preaching by sending his money to a sponsoring church instead of through the church treasury (Neither is in the Bible!) may be honestly mistaken, but he is not an antichrist or a heretic. Supporting an orphanage is not a denial of the person of Christ. These are matters of opinion, honest differences, and they are not destructive to the soul, unless perchance one is lead to go against his own conscience.

So, there are differences that can be absorbed within a loving and accepting fellowship. We can have churches that support Herald of Truth and orphanages and those that do not. We can have churches that use instrumental music or have a Sunday School and those that do not. And on and on this can go, with each Christian and each congregation following his or its own preference and conscience.

But we cannot have churches that are antichrist or deny the gospel or are heretical and churches that are not. Here the line has to be drawn, for light cannot fellowship darkness, Christ cannot fellowship Belial.

But it is an entirely different matter when brethren differ over incidentals, methods, opinions, scruples, and honest efforts to understand and follow the Bible.

If we leave the matter where brethren Wolfgang and Harrell have it, unity is an impossibility, for we are never going to see all these things alike. So long as we say, "You have to see it my way for me to accept you," we will continue in our sectarian ways, dividing and subdividing. But if we will allow love and forbearance to transcend petty differences, we can "Preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Do we really desire to follow the plain injunctions of Scripture in this regard?

The choice is ours. We can be sectarian or we can be free in Christ. We can be petty and shallow or we can be magnanimous and reasonable. We can responsibly make distinctions between differences, recognizing that while some are crucial others are less important, or we can irresponsibly preserve the old bromides of our insipid sectarianism.

Sweet reasonableness! That is what we see in Jesus and in Scripture, and that is the great need of the hour. — *the Editor*

We do not ask them to give up their opinions. We ask them only not to impose them upon others. Let them hold their opinions, but let them hold them as private property. It is cruel to excommunicate a man because of the imbecility of his intellect. I never did, at any time, exclude a man for a mere imbecility of intellect; or, in other words, because he could not assent to my opinions. We will acknowledge all as Christians who acknowledge the gospel facts and obey Jesus Christ. —Alexander Campbell, *Mill. Harb.*, 1830, 145-146.

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The Hope of the Believer . . .

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THE TRANSFORMING FRIENDSHIP

What is the most effective way to introduce Jesus to some poor Soul who is in need of his love and grace? In Scripture and in theology Jesus is often presented in three dimensions: as prophet, priest and king. Is this the way to introduce Jesus to someone living in our kind of world?

The average person thinks of a prophet as some bearded radical bellowing forth fire and brimstone. He sees a priest as a forlorn soul in a long black robe attending some altar. And if you introduce Jesus as a king, he might well think of the likes of Henry VIII or Louis XVI.

While Jesus is indeed prophet, priest, and king, these are things that one can come to appreciate farther down the road. He must be introduced to those who do not know him in a more relevant way.

Even to present Jesus as the Savior of the world has its problems in our pragmatic world, and we have to face that fact. Many a person has trouble seeing how the death of a lonely Jew 2,000 years ago could make all that much difference in their lives today. It is, after all, rather thick theology, and it really gets muddled when you talk about being 'justified by his blood."

The term "Lord" was a choice description of Jesus to the early Christians, borrowed as it was from the Romans who applied the term to the Caesars. While the Romans worshipped Caesar as *Kurios,* the Christians insisted that Jesus was their *Kurios.* The apostle Peter not only proclaimed him as "Lord and Christ" on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, but afterward urged believers to "sanctify Christ in your hearts as Lord" (1 Pet. 3:15). This too can come later when the believer has a deeper understanding of who Jesus Christ really is.

I am persuaded that the best entree in introducing Jesus to the man on the street is the way he was first accepted when he himself was a man on the street - as a friend. He came to be known as one who made himself "a friend of tax collectors and sinners." When Peter drew his sword in the Garden of Gethsemane, it was not to protect the Lord of glory or the preexistent Logos, for he then had no such concepts of Jesus, assuming he ever did. He was protecting his dear friend.

And this is the way Jesus first presented himself, as a friend. "No longer do I call you servants," he said to his disciples in Jn. 15:15, "for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you."

He here refers to an intimate friendship where the most sacred and most secret truths are shared. He put utmost trust in his disciples; he shared his deepest longings and revealed to them things known only from God. *Now I call you friends!* How remarkable it is that Jesus chose friendship as the basis of his relationship with men!

When he introduced the concept of friendship he pointed to the lengths to which it would go: "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (Jn 15:13). In the next verse he goes on to say, "You are My friends if you do whatever I command you."

Our Lord is teaching not only friendship but a transforming friendship. To have Jesus for a friend, and to be a friend to him, is to change one's life.

We tend to imitate those that we admire and we are inclined to become like those with whom we share intimate friendship. It is said that as people live together for a long time they begin to think alike and even to look alike. When folk tell me that in my old age I seem to look better, I remind them that I have been living with Ouida for 45 years!

What a difference it should make to have Jesus for a longtime intimate friend! It should cause us to become more like him. That is the force of what Paul says in 2 Cor. 3:18: "We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord."

This is the answer to the world's most serious malady, Me-ism, and the church is also afflicted with this disease. We are so selfish and spend so much time thinking of ourselves and what we want that we are very unlike the one who invites us to be his friend and to become like him. Paul says that when we look into the person of Jesus Christ it is like looking into a mirror. Instead of seeing the likeness of ourselves we ought to see the likeness of Jesus. If he is our friend and we are his friend, we become more and more like him — "We are being transformed into his image from glory to glory." Isn't that what being a Christian is all about?

There is a story growing out of the Turkish-Armenian war that illustrates the difference Jesus makes in one's life. Turkish soldiers entered a home and murdered the parents and the teenage boys, but the captain spared the 20-year old girl so she could become the object of his lust. After he had repeatedly shattered her womanhood she managed to escape. Later in the war she was serving as a nurse and was assigned to a POW hospital where she attended enemy soldiers. One night when she was making the rounds in a ward that had just received freshly wounded Turkish soldiers, she came upon a man who looked terrifyingly familiar. When she lifted her lantern higher and looked upon his pale face, she knew that it was the man who had murdered her parents and brothers and had ravished her.

The attending physician told her that the man would die if he did not receive special attention. What should she do? She would only need to neglect him and he would die, passive homicide. She was to testify later that she was strongly tempted to let him die, but she chose to do all she could to save his life, and so she nursed him all through the night with special care. The next morning when he was conscious and out of danger, the doctor thought he should meet the nurse that saved his life. His face flushed when he saw her. "I think we have met," he said to her. "Yes, Captain, we have met," she responded.

Unable to handle what had happened, he snarled at her with, "Why didn't you let me die?" She quietly explained, "I have a friend named Jesus Christ who taught me to love my enemies and to do good to those who persecute me." Now calmed by her imposing presence, he said to her, "I've never known a religion like that. Tell me more about your friend."

The tragedy of our time is that even in the church we have multitudes like that Turkish soldier who have never known a religion like that, and it is because they do not know Jesus Christ. They may go to church and they may know about Jesus, but they do not know the transforming friendship that he offers.

And therein is the lost secret: His friendship is offered as a gift. No strings attached. It is unconditional. We do not have to be good enough or right enough or religious enough. His transforming friendship is as free to us as it was to the despised tax collectors and prostitutes of his own time.

We do not have to knock at Jesus' door, seeking his friendship. He knocks on ours. Such symbolism is drawn in Rev. 3:20 where he is pictured as standing at the door of his own church, seeking entrance. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock," it reads. "If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."

What is especially beautiful about this scene is that Jesus seeks close fellowship with a church that is described as wretched, blind, miserable, poor, and naked. Indeed, they were self-righteous in that they supposed they were rich and had need of nothing. But nonetheless in his mercy Jesus comes knocking, offering transforming friendship.

The latch is on the inside. Jesus is not going to barge in. He does not impose his friendship. It is offered as a gift. In this case it is offered to his own people, his own church, folk who are supposed to know him already but do not. The scene allows us to imagine him knocking at the door of our hearts. We only need to open the door. He offers intimate fellowship, as if sitting side by side with us at table. We can talk with him, confide in him, draw upon his strength, share our joys and sorrows.

Faith is partly imagination. We can imagine Jesus being with us, always, no matter what happens. When we are on the mountain peaks of life, he is there. When disease and old age comes, he is there. When death comes, even if it be violent, he is there. He is a friend that sticks closer than a brother, as a proverb puts it.

It is an appropriate question to ask the modern Christian: Have you invited Jesus into your heart? That is the only real solution to Me-ism, for when Jesus moves in and takes down the sign that read "Empty" and puts up a sign that reads "Occupied," life is going to be lived more for others than for ourselves. From that time on we have a friend living with us who continually transforms us into his own image.

So, this is an effective way to minister to others once we ourselves enjoy the gift of transforming friendship. "I have a friend who can help you" we can say to a troubled soul, and it might well be a workable entree if we ourselves really know that friend. — *the Editor*

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The Hope of the Believer . . .

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Visiting Other Churches: New Series, No.7...

A CHURCH FOR GAYS AND LESBIANS

After I visited every church in my hometown of Denton, Texas, 70 in all, a new one came to town. It meets on Sunday evening at the Unitarian Universalist Church, which is probably the only church in town that would allow these people on their property. They are a pariah church, hated and rejected by other believers and by society in general. In places where they have buildings of their own crosses are sometimes burned in the yard, facilities are on occasion destroyed by arsonists, and their offices receive obscene phone calls. Their ministers cannot study in the seminaries of other churches, and as a denomination they were rejected for membership by the National Council of Churches. They may well be the most scorned church since the first century, and yet it is made up of intelligent, affluent, and peaceloving people.

Its official name is the Universal Fellowship of the Metropolitan Community Church, MCC for short. Now only 20 years old it is one of the few growing churches, with more than 30,000 members in 200 congregations in over a dozen nations, with headquarters in Los Angeles. It is not in disfavor because of any doctrinal peculiarity, for it is doctrinally

consistent with mainline Protestantism. There is one and only one reason: It is predominantly gay and lesbian. And yet they do not seek to impose their lifestyle upon others. They contend that while God has made most people heterosexual he has made some homosexual and that this should be recognized.

It is estimated that upwards of 10% of the human race is homosexual, all around the world and throughout history. This means there are many millions of gays in the world today, some of whom may be your close kin, even if you don't know it. We can rave and rant and hurl invectives all we please, but nothing will change the fact that homosexuals are here to stay. They are not going to cease being homosexual anymore than heterosexuals are going to cease being heterosexual. There is evidence that many of these people did not choose to be gay but they were born that way. For the modern church to accept gays into its fellowship only on the condition that they cease being gays not only runs the risk of being contrary to the spirit of Christ but is woefully unrealistic as well.

In 1968 a Pentecostal pastor in Los Angeles by the name of Troy Perry was defrocked when he "came out" as gay. Seeing first hand how the established church rejects gays and lesbians, he proceeded to form the MCC. His autobiography has the stunning title *The Lord Is My Shepherd And He Knows I Am Gay,* in which he admits that Paul doesn't like homosexuals.

While the Denton MCC is a tiny church of about 25, the Dallas MCC is so large that it overflows two Sunday a. m. services. It is the 12th largest church in Dallas and among the top 100 in the nation. I visited both of them, and if one did not know he would have no reason to suspect that they were gay churches. People of our tradition would be impressed that they observe Communion each Lord's day, and they seem to do it less perfunctorily and more devotionally than we do. The minister lifts the bread and the cup and pronounces the words of institution, as Jesus did and as the church through the ages has done, but which we do not do. The communicant kneels at the altar and is served either by the pastor or by several "lay ministers." Into each ear it is whispered, "This is the body and blood of Christ."

But a keen observer at Dallas MCC would pick up clues that it was different. Whoever heard of a church that has far more men than women present? And most of them young, well under 40 for the most part. They were often paired off, men with arms around each other at the altar, women likewise, but few if any couples of mixed sex, though some were of mixed race. I saw only one couple that might have been a man and wife sitting together. And only an occasional child, accompanied by a female pair, probably from a previous marriage.

I had heard that I would see men kissing each other on the lips all over the place, but I saw only one instance of this, in the activity hall. A holy kiss it was, like the Bible talks about, I am sure they would say. But there were tons of hugs between both sexes, like brothers and sisters would. They were joyous, friendly, and concerned for each other. I was hugged so much, by men and women alike (I prefer the women's embraces in case you are wondering!) that I felt as if I were at a love feast. They were really turned on, lots of enthusiasm.

I felt more accepted than I often do among my own Churches of Christ, and that may be because I was with people who are also rejected by their churches. We were all rejects, only for different reasons, and this drew us close together. People find a common bond in what they perceive as persecution, and this helps to explain the dynamic of the gay church.

One man at the Dallas church told me he came there from the Church of Christ and that there was a great difference. When I asked him in what way he said, "The Holy Spirit is present here."

In the activity hall I sat down beside another visitor, a woman from New Mexico who was visiting her sister, and almost certainly "straight." When I casually commented that the MCC was different, she said, "What of it, we're all different, and besides no one asks me what I do in my bedroom, and I don't ask anybody what they do in theirs. Its none of my business." But few Christians are as tolerant as she. Even those who are usually tolerant toward others have a problem being that way toward gays. There are readers of this journal who will take offence at this article if I do not condemn homosexuals and homosexuality, and I understand how they feel and love them no less for it.

I met one person I knew, who was as surprised to see me as I was to see that person, and who asked, "Don't tell my parents that you saw me here; they are not ready for this now." There was a sigh of relief when I gave assurance of confidentiality. This points up a problem for the gay church. While it seeks to evangelize the gay community, one has to come out of the closet, or at least take the chance of being found out, when he attends a gay church. It is true that parents are usually devastated when they learn that a son or daughter is gay, which may be motivated mostly by selfish pride. It is certainly not unconditional love. What kind of love is it that says, "I love you so long as you are like me and so long as you do not embarrass me"?

A touching incident in the Denton MCC pointed this up. During their sharing time a man who is a financial counselor reported on his visits to AIDS patients. It was getting to him he said, almost in tears, ministering to those dying of AIDS. He wanted the church to pray that he might have strength to carry on. And he asked them to pray especially for Ron who is not only dying of a dreadful and infamous disease, but he has to die rejected by his own parents.

If one wonders, as my own dear wife does, what the gay church does with "all those passages that condemn homosexuality," he can read pamphlets published by the church that deal with them, such as "Christianity and Homosexuality" and "Homosexuality: What the Bible Does and Does Not Say." The gist of what they say is that sexual perversion, which is what these passages condemn, is of course sinful whether it be homosexual or heterosexual. Sexual perversion is lustful, loveless sex, or "burning in their lust one for another" (Rom. 1:27). This is always wrong, whether between husband or wife or those of the same gender. They grant that the Bible condemns some homosexual acts, just as it condemns some heterosexual acts, but not homosexuality itself, and that it never deals with homosexual love and certainly does not condemn it. The "pervert" is the one who practices "unnatural" sex, which is sex born of lust and without love, which describes the way some men have sex with their wives as well as the way some homosexuals have sex with each other.

They point to the case of David and Jonathan, not to suggest that there was genital love between them, but to show that a great and good "normal" man like David might love another man more than he loves any woman, as David did Jonathan. It becomes a question of how that love between them could be rightly manifested.

Their most impressive point is that Jesus, who lived among homosexuals, said not one word about homosexuality, even though he often named long lists of sins. They note that the sins that really mattered to him were pride, injustice, greed, and hypocrisy. They point out that if Jesus would associate with such pariah as lepers, despised tax collectors and harlots, he would not reject a gay or lesbian. A favorite passage is: "Anyone who comes to me I will in no wise cast out." Anyone! If you sit with them in worship and see how they praise the Lord, you will be convinced that they are assured that Christ accepts them. Their invitation to Communion is: "You don't have to be a member of this church or any other church. You only have to be a follower of Jesus Christ." Their official prayer is, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

As for the gay church's interpretation of the anti-homosexual scriptures, the church at large sees this as indulging in self-justification, for the passages make it clear that "unnatural" sex is sex between those of the same gender. John Murray of Westminster Theological Seminary speaks for the church catholic when he says, "The offence of homosexuality is the

abandonment of the divinely constituted order in reference to sex." The passage that especially speaks to the sincere gay Christian is 1 Cor. 6:9-11, where it shows that homosexuals could and did change by being "washed" of their sin. As for Jesus not condemning homosexuality *per se,* there are many sins that he did not explicitly mention that are nonetheless sinful. But there is a growing consensus that a distinction must be made between being homosexual, which is not sinful, and homosexual acts, which are sinful. And so, most Christians say, those who are gay by "nature" must be celibates if they would be Christians. The gay church disagrees, insisting that we all have the right to be all that God has made us.

The gay church is against promiscuous sex and encourages one on one relationships based on love and respect. The pastor of a gay church sets the example by having but one lover. For this reason the church has the ordinance of "marriage," which they call Holy Union since homosexuals cannot be legally married. In the worship bulletin at Dallas MCC there was a notice that the flowers on the altar were given by two male members "in celebration of the first anniversary of their Holy Union."

So as to do some hard thinking about this question let's take the case of two Christian women who deeply love each other and are sexually attracted to each other, and who have not the slightest interest in men. The gay church would say they would practice "perverted sex" if they forced themselves into a loveless relationship with men, and would we not agree? If a woman cannot truly love a man she should not marry him. What then may these women do? Can they not live with each other and delight in each other's company? Could they sleep in the same bed? Could they spend the night in a loving embrace? Many of us have sisters who slept that way and we never thought anything about it.

Could they hold hands and kiss each other? Would these be lesbian acts? Are we prepared to tell these sisters in Christ precisely what liberties they can take with each other's bodies and remain faithful Christians? If so, why stop there? Why not also dictate what a man and his wife can and cannot do in their bedroom? Some married couples do things sexually that others would consider "perverted" and would not think of doing. Perhaps the wisdom of the lady from New Mexico is appropriate: *It is none of our business.* We should at least concede that this problem is more complicated than we have made it.

I consider my own position as liberating: I do not have to serve as judge over other people's lives. I am committed to being like Jesus Christ, who said he came into the world not to condemn people but to make them whole. I will accept and associate with all those that Jesus accepted and associated with, and I know of no class of humanity, however scorned and despised by society, that he rejected. This does not mean that he always approved of their life-style.

That is where I am, I can love and accept people without approving of all they do. And since Christ's church is to be a haven for sinful humanity, I believe that my church and your church should accept all people who show any inclination at all to follow him whom we all love, having never seen. — *the Editor*

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RECOGNITION OF THE LORDSHIP OF JESUS (4)

W. Carl Ketcherside

The authority and power as delegated to the apostles was intended to continue during the reign of God's anointed. We believe this to be proven by the following:

1. When Jesus commissioned them to go and make disciples of all nations he did so upon the basis that all authority in heaven and on earth had been given unto him. His promise was that if they acted in all fidelity he would be with them "always, to the close of the age" (Mt. 28:19,20).

2. The power to bind and loose on earth with heavenly recognition of the authority so exercised was not subject to temporal limitation. "Truly I say to you, whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Mt. 18:18).

3. The apostles were to occupy thrones and judge during the regime of the Son of God. A throne is symbolic of authority and the right to judge implies exercise of power. "You are those who have continued with me in my trials; as my Father appointed a kingdom for me, so do I appoint for you, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Lk. 22:28-30). Here is proof from Jesus that the apostles were to possess authority beyond their span of life upon earth.

4. They constituted a component in the foundation of the temple of the Lord, a structure equivalent to the one body composed of Jews and Gentiles who have access in one Spirit unto the Father. These are "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Eph. 2:20-22). It is apparent that so long as the temple of God stands, the apostles must be in place in the foundation.

In commenting upon this verse Albert Barnes writes, "On them and their doctrine we can build. On them the church is reared. It is not on the opinion of philosophers and lawgivers; not on creeds, symbols, traditions, and the decisions of councils; it is on the authority of the inspired Book of God. The church is in its most healthy state when it appeals for its doctrine most directly to the Bible.

5. The perpetuity of the place and authority of the apostles in the divine scheme is evidenced by the fact that their names are inscribed on the foundation of the eternal city the new Jerusalem. John, who was one of the apostles, was provided an apocalyptic vision. He says, "And in the Spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God... And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (Rev. 21:10,14).

Christianity differs from every system of religion devised by men in that it is a divine revelation. All others are the discoveries or inventions of human genius. Christianity is not a philosophy, a code of personal ethics, or a formal declaration of behavior. It is a relationship with God and Christ exemplified by principles growing out of a divine nature rather than by precepts imposed externally and legally. It is a fellowship of the redeemed, a fraternity of the reconciled. It was a mystery to mankind, hidden in the divine will until revealed in the fullness of time. "When you read this you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (Eph. 3:4, 5).

Since it was revealed to the "apostles and prophets" they constitute our source of information relative to its nature. When men become confused or entangled in their reasoning concerning it, the court of appeal must be to the words of those who received the revelation. If the Holy Spirit knew the things of God, and revealed those things to the authorized spokesmen, we must revert to the words of the holy envoys if we would recapture the mind of God. When the weight of opinions and divergent interpretations saddles the church with a yoke which it cannot bear, the strength must be renewed, not by occasional injections of new philosophical deductions, but by recovery of the primitive proclamation, power and purpose.

When God's people become involved in schism, we cannot hope to achieve peace by relying upon debates with theologians, regardless of how sincere they may be to attain that desirable goal. Indeed, it is out of such debates most of our strife has arisen. It is only when all of those who love God, both small and great, resolve to consult the apostles, without partisan prejudice, that we can gain renewal for our day. — *published posthumously*

When we talk of restoration, we do not imply that the church disappeared or went out of existence. We use the term in the same sense that the art dealer does when talking about "restoring" a painting. The work of the" restorer" is not to create another picture, nor produce a new one, but remove the grime and dirt that has gathered until the original can be seen in its full glory. —*Carl Ketcherside*

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A LOVE STORY

Cecil Hook

When Rodney started to school, Ashley was in his class. He had seen her before but he was not interested in girls. He loved the rough and tumble companionship of the neighborhood boys, especially of Keith and Roger. They ran and wrestled and played, testing their skills against each other. Besides, even though Ashley lived only three streets over, hers was a better neighborhood which looked forbidding to Rodney. Even her name sounded too sophisticated for him.

After years of ignoring Ashley, even though they were in the same class, he began to change his interests. Keith and Roger no longer looked as good to him as Ashley and other girls did. But timidity would not allow him to show her any attention. As they grew older Ashley grew more beautiful, personable, and poised. Even though Rodney thought she was the most charming person in the world, he felt that she was out of his class and unattainable for a date or for a friend.

Then Rodney began to see that Ashley was noticing him, smiling when he looked at her, and even approaching him for pleasant conversation. Realizing this, he finally gained the courage to ask her for a date. The love story progressed from there. He felt her deep love for him in spite of his bumbling efforts to please her and to copy her refinements.

She gave him the most thrilling assurance that a young man could ever hear. "Rodney," she whispered, "I love you without any reservations. You could never do anything that would stop me from loving you. You might do things to hurt me deeply, but I will always love you. I want to share the rest of my life with you." And she did. Such love caused Rodney to become the most loving and dedicated husband any woman could dream of having. Their lives were bound together by a most secure love that surmounted all problems and gave them peace in all times of difficulty.

From my earliest interest in religion, I was attracted by the rough and tumble doctrinal discussions which tested our knowledge of the Bible and our skills in argument. Through knowledge and skill, we thought we were able to prove ourselves worthy and to work our way through salvation.

In reading the Bible as a teenager, I read such passages as "Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not reckon his sin" (Rom. 4:8). But Paul was quoting David there, and David must have been exaggerating for emphasis, a sort of poetic license. That could not be for me. It was out of my class. Just ignore it. Go on in the tried and true law-keeping and achievement route. Those passages about imputed righteousness were several streets over in the forbidden neighborhood of the denominations.

With the passing of years and my gradual development in understanding, those passages began to hold more charm. In fact, they were alluring! But Paul just could not be saying that I could be the person against whom God would not impute sin!

In time I began to hear God saying, "I love you with an unconditional love. I will love you even if you don't love me. I love you so much that, if you will commit yourself to me in faith, I will no longer take notice of your sins." Unbelievable! He said that to me! How could I but commit myself to him in lifelong devotion?

Now it is a wonderfully peaceful relationship that we have - the peace that passes understanding. My life of works falls short and is ineffective. I stumble and bumble. I sin. But he does not hold it against me.

What a love story! What a happy ending - and continuation! — *1350 Huisache, New Braunfels, Tx. 78130*

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OUR CHANGING WORLD

In July upwards of 10,000 gathered in Nashville for the Nashville Jubilee, the first of an annual series designed to celebrate the Christian life. It was sponsored by the Madison Church of Christ and all the speakers were from the Church of Christ. One speaker, Mike Cope of Searcy, Ark., made an appeal for unity among Churches of Christ. He noted that uniform agreement on every issue is not possible or even desirable. "You want uniformity?," the press quoted him as asking, "They had it in the Middle Ages." We should put aside our differences and behave like "porcupines in November," warming up to each other even if it hurts, Cope said. While the Jubilee will be sponsored annually by different congregations in the Nashville area, one congregation, the Robertson County Church of Christ, registered its disapproval of the Jubilee in general and what Mike Cope said in particular by way of a $1500 ad in the Nashville *Tennessean.* The ad charged that the Jubilee and the things being said would turn the Church of Christ from the old paths.

During the summer "Wrestling With God," a documentary on the life of Alexander Campbell, was filmed at Bethany College. Five Hollywood stars and 20 area extras were used in producing the film. Paul Mercier, a veteran stage actor, played the part of Alexander Campbell, while Allison Gregory, who has appeared in musical comedies and other stage, TV and film work, played the part of Margaret Campbell. The film will be available for rent by churches and is expected to appear on public and commercial TV

Also during the summer Abilene Christian University dedicated its new College of Biblical Studies building, which will allow 1,000 students to study the Bible in various rooms at the same time. It provides the latest in state-of-the-art facilities and teaching equipment.

Ouida and I have had a quiet but busy summer. I have been home more than usual, which is important to Ouida since she often needs my help in caring for her mother. We had lots of delightful house guests and we did things about the house. You ought to see how Ouida can hang a ceiling fan! I did get away for a few short assignments, including a trip to the Ozarks of Arkansas with grandson Ashley. Ouida and I saw Ramses the Great in Dallas and were impressed by the majesty of it all.

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READERS' EXCHANGE

I have lived more than half of my life in legalism and 12 years in grace. I have been skeptical and cynical about the "Churches of Christ," and at times I have loved the immorality of this world more than God. Your Christian walk and service say: You can do it; you can love your brothers and fellow man; you can serve without reservation in the kingdom; you can share the grace of Christ; you can raise children in the faith; you can become like Christ. — *Forrest and Patty Smith, Lubbock. Tx.*

If Churches of Christ would do three things (which unfortunately I'm afraid they won't do anytime soon), I could happily continue in their fellowship: (1) Openly admit that there are other Christians beside themselves; (2) Put the emphasis on Christ rather than the church; (3) Put baptism in its proper perspective. K. C. Moser's book, *The Gist of Romans,* should be required reading for every member of the Church of Christ. I make copies of the book's Introduction and send them to the radio evangelists who talk about "contacting the blood" in baptism. —*Larry Dotson, Centerville, Tn.*

(Leaders among Churches of Christ would do well to heed this brother's suggestions, otherwise we will keep on losing more people than we gain. He is right that our own K. C. Moser issued the warning a generation ago, but we did not listen. — *Ed.)*

I have enjoyed the book *Call Me Blessed* by Faith Martin very much. It is good news about women's rights that should have circulated years ago. I can't believe I have lived this long without even knowing I was being affected by the traditional male attitude on women. The Church of Christ teaching on women has had a negative impact. I've had many unpleasant experiences at church since my eyes have been opened on women's rights. — *Joan Morrison, Columbus, Oh.*

(You may order the books recommended by these two readers from us. K. C. Moser's The Gist of Romans is $6.00 and Faith Martin's *Call* Me Blessed is $8.95, including postage. — Ed.)

Tributes to Carl Ketcherside

One could say that Carl Ketcherside defined the term "fellowship" in a manner that engendered a new spirit of hope for centrists in the American movement to restore the New Testament concept of unity in the 20th century.—Keith Sigler in *Faithgram*

I never touched his hands, but my life has been forever changed by his heart and mind. — Kenneth Traynor, Bristol, RI.

While his admirers praise his unifying efforts, a myriad of dissenters view his work as having been destructively divisive. Many have branded him a reactionary. Yet none can deny that Carl Ketcherside left an indelible stamp on the church, possibly many stamps. For example, a slogan attributed to him is taking hold: "Wherever God has a child, I have a brother or sister." — John Murphy, editor, *Christian News of South Texas*.

As my books go into the world, a part of his influence goes in them. I thank God for Carl Ketcherside. -Cecil Hook, NewBraunfels, Tx.

We all cherish having known him and his unquenchable spirit and his love for all he knew and touched. -Louis R. Price, Citrus Heights, Ca.

He left us all quite a legacy. — Ruby Barbee, Yukon, Ok.

Carl Ketcherside was such a man as Hegel described when he wrote, "A great man condemns the world to the task of explaining him." — Harold Fox, Edgar, Ne.

He was equally at home in the halls of ivy-covered towers of a great university or on the sidewalks of St. Louis with her street people. — Bill Gahr, Fenton, Mo.

We were sorry to hear about your and our friend Carl. — *a card signed by 33 members of the Grace Community Church of Christ, Caruthersville, Mo.*

I could list many things I learned from Carl Ketcherside, but let me share four of the most important: (1) All truths are equally true but all truths are not equally important; (2) Since God created us as thinking beings, the only unity possible for people who think is unity within diversity; (3) I have no more right to choose my brothers and sister in Christ than I have to select my brothers and sisters in the flesh, for common parentage determines both; (4) If God accepts me as I am, warts and all, then I should accept my brothers and sisters in Christ in spite of their errors. — *David Reagan, Plano, Tx.*

May 25, 1989 marked the end of the long controversial life of a talented, influential, well-known preacher among Churches of Christ and Christian Churches. . . Friend and foe alike attest to his power in the pulpit and on the debate platform. — L. A. Stauffer in *Guardian of Truth*

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BOOK NOTES

The Bleating Sheep by Robert W. Blackshear contends that the great need of our day is for the church, as God's sheep, to be nourished by godly, qualified elders, who are to be shepherds to the flock. It calls for Body life and mutual ministry, and it questions the modern minister system. It is well titled in that it is a crisis" book, emerging from the agonizing needs of Churches of Christ. I read this book in manuscript form and told the author that if we believed and practiced what is set forth we would be a far more fruitful people. I am confident you will agree. $6.00 postpaid.

Michael Green is always worth reading, and this goes for *his I Believe in the Holy Spirit,* which was first published in 1975 but is now in a new edition. It treats virtually every aspect of the Holy Spirit, along with a chapter on the charismatic movement. While not himself charismatic, he seeks to be a bridge builder between those that are and those that are not. The thrust of the book is that the Holy Spirit is the means of unity in the church. $12.95 postpaid.

What the Bible Says About Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage by Olan Hicks is a liberating book for those caught up in all the legalism on this complex subject. The author believes that there is no law of God that forbids any divorced person from marrying. And he draws an important distinction between committing adultery and "living in adultery," There is no such thing as the latter, he contends. Persuasive and biblical. $13.95 postpaid.

Since we have them on hand and would like to put them in the hands of those who would appreciate them, we will send you 18 back copies of this paper, selected at random over the past 25 years, for only $3.00. This is especially for our more recent readers who would like to see what we have been saying through the years. Selected back issues are 40 cents each plus postage.

We will still send you a free copy of *The Stone-Campbell Movement* by Leroy Garrett when you send us 8 subs to this paper at $3.00 each (total $24.00), including your own, new or renewal. But you must request the book. Otherwise you may purchase this widely-read and sometimes controversial history for $24.00, which is bargain enough since it is over 700 pages. We pay the postage when you pay in advance.

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